

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS

THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE



THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNAL

OR Sheridan Keene on the Water Front

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNAL; OR, SHERIDAN KEENE ON THE WATER FRONT.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED SIGNAL.

"Forward there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Starboard a little, and run up through Black Rock channel!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The commands, sounding deep and heavy on the night air, were issued by the pilot of the harbor police tug *Watchman*, and the ready responses come from the man in the wheelhouse.

The pilot was seated aft at the time, in company with Sergeant Joe Henry, of the harbor police, and one of the Boston inspectors, Detective Sheridan Keene.

The latter had been in Hingham on special duty during the afternoon, and having run

upon the genial sergeant, who happened to be at the wharf with the harbor police tug, Keene had easily been persuaded to return with him by boat to the city. They had been late in getting under way, however, and it then was nearly eleven o'clock in the evening.

The summer night was intensely dark. Not a star was visible in the heavy sky. The signal lanterns of vessels here and there, the outlines of which were lost in the darkness; the lights on the distant mainland and on the numerous islands dotting Boston harbor, together with the loftier and brighter gleam from the several lighthouses—these alone relieved the ebon gloom.

A brisk wind was blowing from the east, giving a nasty chop to the ebbing sea, and

clouds of white spray were hurtled over the *Watchman's* bow as she plowed her nose into the ragged waves.

She had left Hull and Pemberton astern, and in response to the pilot's commands was then bearing for the channel between George's and Lovell's islands. Boston light, and that at the narrows, loomed up like huge stars far away over the starboard bow; but the grim walls of nearer Fort Warren were wholly invisible through the darkness.

The temperature was agreeable, however, despite the late hour of the evening and the free sweep of the wind, and the officers found the after deck preferable to the inclosed wheelhouse.

Their conversation at about that time related to numerous breaks and robberies which had for several weeks been occurring with alarming frequency in the seaboard towns within a few miles of Boston, and to many bold thefts from wharves and club houses along the water front in all directions, a clue to none of which had as yet been secured either by the shore or the harbor police. Yet the work of the thieves had been bold in the extreme, and the mystery involving the outrages had become a matter of serious interest to the entire police department, municipal and suburban.

"I hold, and I have held all along," Sergeant Henry was saying, when the pilot's commands briefly interrupted him; "that there should be a more systematic co-operation between our service and that of you detectives. I believe that is the only way by which these depredations can be stopped, and the criminals, whoever they may be, successfully apprehended."

"I think you may be right, sergeant," nodded Sheridan Keene.

"I feel very sure I am right."

"What are your ideas on the subject?" asked the detective, ready always to con-

sider the opinion of another in cases of such serious importance.

"My opinion is based on facts which, to me at least, seem very significant," replied the sergeant. "To begin with, these depredations have one and all occurred along the water front. There is scarce a town from Gloucester to Plymouth that has not been treated to one or more of these mysterious robberies."

"That is true, sergeant."

"Well, don't you make anything of that?"

"I am waiting to hear what you make of it," Sheridan Keene rejoined, smiling oddly.

"Reports are constantly being made of a new case, Detective Keene," the sergeant continued. "They most all come from the shore towns, and even those crimes committed in the city proper have invariably been in the immediate locality of the rivers, either the Charles or Mystic. We have had these reports from the Back Bay and from Cambridge, and not less than a score of breaks have been reported from East Boston and Chelsea."

"As many as that, surely."

"Added to this, many of the wharves and vessels have suffered petty losses, and even the Navy Yard has not been free from these rascally depredations. All this appeals to me at least with noteworthy significance."

"That the culprits are seamen, or at least men who are operating from boats along the water front?"

"Precisely."

"You may be right."

"And that is the reason, to my way of thinking," added the sergeant, "why the shore police find it utterly impossible to get any track of the scoundrels. In not a solitary case have the local police been able to find a trace of the criminals guilty of these breaks. They invariably have reported that no suspicious parties had been seen in the

locality, neither entering nor leaving the town. I believe, Keene, that the work is being done, if not by seamen, at least by some gang of crafty scoundrels who are at work with boats or a vessel of some sort."

"There is something in that, sergeant, and the possibility already has been discussed at police headquarters," said Sheridan Keene, gravely.

"Forward, there!" here shouted the pilot, who had risen to his feet.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Hard a-port!"

"Hard a-port, sir!"

The speedy little vessel swung with a long sweep round George's Island, and the light on Long Island burst suddenly into view.

"Steady as she is!"

"Steady, sir!"

"Have you seen any vessel about here, sergeant, the actions of which appear at all suspicious?" inquired Keene, resuming the conversation.

"Not I!" laughed Sergeant Henry. "If I had, you may be very sure I should have been after her long before this."

"No doubt of it."

"No, sir, I cannot locate a single craft that offers grounds for an investigation. Whoever these criminals are, they are doing their infamous work in a decidedly crafty and successful manner."

"Have you had any talk with Chief Watts on the subject?"

"Only in a cursory way."

"You mean that no definite plan of co-operation has been discussed?"

"Precisely."

"Why don't you broach the subject again to him? I will do so to-morrow morning, if you think well of my taking a hand in it."

"I wish you would," said Sergeant Henry, quickly.

"I'll do better," laughed Keene; "I'll set

the machine going the first thing in the morning."

"Perhaps I had better run up to headquarters and join you."

"No need of that. I'll telephone down to you, if it's worth while."

"Very well, then. I think that may be better."

"What light is that, pilot?" inquired Keene, a few minutes later, as the *Watchman* was plowing her course up President Roads.

The pilot turned in the direction indicated, and gazed out through the darkness over the starboard rail.

"Deer Island light, Inspector Keene," he rejoined.

"Not on the island, is it?"

"No, sir; off a cable's length or so."

"A dark night afloat, isn't it?"

"Very, sir. Yet the air is quite clear, and that beats a fog to death."

Keene laughed and rose to stretch his legs.

"What do you make of that red light over beyond Apple Island, pilot?" he presently asked.

"There is no light near Apple Island, sir."

"I mean the red light beyond—ah, it's gone!"

The pilot peered off through the darkness over the starboard quarter, and slowly shook his head.

"I reckon you must have been mistaken, inspector," he said, indifferently.

"Oh, no, I was not."

"There is no light up that way."

"Ah, but there it is again!" Keene almost immediately exclaimed.

"That's not a lighthouse," said the pilot, now curiously observing the distant gleam of red through the ebon darkness.

"No, but it's a light," laughed Keene.

"That's true enough, sir, and it's on shore."

"There she goes again!" cried the detective, as again the crimson gleam suddenly vanished.

The pilot thrust his hands deeper into the pockets of his peajacket, and bracing himself between the rail and the after-house, fell to studying more intently the unusual circumstance.

"There it shows again," said Keene, at his elbow.

"It's a bit curious, I admit," the pilot growled through his heavy beard.

"Have you ever noticed anything like it before?"

"Never, sir."

"Can you locate the light?"

"I'd say it was over on Winthrop heights, inspector, yet it's not dead easy to place it precisely on a night like this. She's gone again."

"It evidently is being manipulated from some considerable elevation."

"Yes, sir; and I'd now say for certain it is somewhere on Winthrop heights."

"May it not be a signal of some sort, think you?" asked Sheridan Keene, with a vague misgiving gradually rising in his mind.

"Not likely, sir," rejoined the pilot, shaking his head.

"Yet it might be."

"Oh, yes; it might, as fur as might's go," was the reply. "But those bluffs are more'n a mile away, inspector, and no vessels of any draught run inside of Apple Island. So it isn't likely, sir, that anybody from that distance would be signaling to a craft away out here."

"There it shows again."

Once more the crimson gleam broke the darkness, piercing the gloom like a blood-red eye suddenly opened to stare out across the ragged sea from its lofty vantage point. It was not entirely alone and isolated.

Other lights were discernible along the rising shore. But all of these were white, and their steady beam streamed unbroken across the night sky.

"It looks to me very much like a signal for some purpose," Sheridan Keene repeated.

But the pilot again shook his head.

"I'd sooner set it down to the doings of men or boys at fools' play on the bluff," he now growled, indifferently. "It's hard telling if it be under cover or outside, but I reckon it's no signal. I'll keep a weather eye off there hereafter, and, if it's a regular thing, I'll——"

"Sail, ho!"

The cry came from the lookout forward and cut short the pilot's remark. He turned abruptly and hastened toward the wheel-house, while Sheridan Keene more slowly followed him.

The tug then was nearly abreast of Castle Island, and was tearing furiously through the choppy sea. A shower of spray and mist greeted Keene as he approached the forward deck, while the roll of the small craft nearly threw him from his feet. Then he heard the pilot cry:

"Where away, lookout?"

"Off starboard just now, sir, but I've lost her! She shows no light, sir."

"No lantern! What the devil——"

"What's the trouble, pilot?" interrupted Sergeant Henry, now appearing suddenly from below.

"A vessel under sail out here with——"

"There she is now, sir, making astern!" yelled the lookout, pointing aft.

Almost at the same moment there sounded in stentorian tones from across the sea:

"Trim in for-ard! Trim flat, you lubbers! Head 'er up sharp! Port hard or you'll be over an infernal tugboat!"

In a sharp wind, and heavy sea at night, startling incidents begin and end in a marvelously short time. Before the last word of the lookout had fairly left his lips, there suddenly loomed up against the Egyptian darkness an indistinct pyramid of white, looking far more like a vague and monstrous ghost against the surrounding gloom than like a vessel's sails.

The hull of the craft was utterly indistinguishable, but the trim of her canvas showed her to have been running with sheets easy on a starboard tack, and holding a course which, owing to some egregious carelessness about her, had rendered a collision seriously imminent.

It was this suddenly discovered peril that had occasioned the furious commands from the vessel's skipper; and as she rounded into the wind scarce fifty feet away over the starboard beam of the police tug, the pilot tore away aft with an ugly oath, and yelled furiously over the windward rail: "Aboard there! Where in thunder are your lanterns?"

"Smashed in lighting! Sorry, sir, but——"

The remainder of the answer that was being bawled back from the stranger's deck was drowned by the furious slatting of her canvas as the sheets went lax when she came into the wind. Now a vague glimpse could be had of her low black hull, showing her to be a small schooner some ninety feet in length; but more precise details, or anything suggestive of her character and vocation, could not be discerned.

The response of her doughty skipper did not appease the wrath of the police boat's pilot. He thundered back in furious accents:

"What craft is that?"

"*Wasp*, Cap't Hardtack, South Boston! Who'r you?"

"The harbor police tug! Don't let us catch you again without——"

"Sorry, sir!" yelled the voice from the schooner, cutting in on the pilot's own. "Sha'n't happen again! Accident! Down y'helm there! Ease away for'ard! We'll run astern, sir! Bound into Old Harbor to anchor! Night, sir!"

Half of this was drowned by distance and wind and splashing sea, for the tug had not slowed down; and within another minute the *Wasp*, if that was her name, had caught her way again and vanished like a spectre into the gloom of the starless night.

Sheridan Keene incidentally turned his gaze in the direction of Winthrop heights.

A red light was no longer discernible on any part of the gloomy shore.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF CAPTAIN BATTLE.

"Robbed, did you say?"

"Aye, sir, robbed! Robbed as clean as a whistle. Robbed under the very nose and eyes o' the harbor police, sir, and as scurvy a bit o' work as ever was done by pirate afloat or land shark ashore!"

The black-bearded little fellow who thus reiterated his misfortune, and who had hustled excitedly into the private office of Chief Inspector Watts about two minutes before, glared furiously at the calm face of his hearers, much as if he defied them to doubt his declaration, or to offer the bare suggestion of an excuse for that official delinquency to which apparently he in part attributed his misfortune.

He was a short man, less than five feet tall; but with a mighty breadth of shoulders and length of arms which were utterly disproportionate with his stubby legs and round, pudgy body.

He was about fifty years old, with a face as tanned as sun could tan it, and with a

bristling coal-black beard and brows. From beneath the latter gleamed a pair of sharp, restless eyes; and the breath with which he had voiced his reiterations was freighted heavily with the fumes of Santa Cruz rum.

He was clad in a blue yacht-cloth suit, the sack coat of which was adorned with a double row of brass buttons; while a stripe of gilt braid girted his blue naval cap.

Altogether he looked quite the pompous, bustling, outspoken little fellow that his garrulous utterances and decisive animation indicated.

"Sit down, sir; it won't cost you any more, and there's less wear on the carpet than when you're dancing about like fat in a hot skillet," said Chief Watts, dryly, in response to the stranger's animated declarations. "And who may you be, that you tear your disclosures to tatters?"

The chief at the same time made a sign for Sheridan Keene to retain his seat. It was the second morning after the experiences of the latter aboard the harbor police tug, and the two had been engaged in discussing the curious incidents of that night, when this stranger unceremoniously entered.

"Well, sir, I might be Cap'n Kidd, the pirate, or Cap'n Jinks of the Horse Marines; but as a matter of fact I am nuther one nor t'other," replied the seaman, with unabashed flippancy. "I am Cap'n Battle, o' the schooner *Mystery*, sir, and an A. B. from keel to truck."

"You say you have been robbed?"

"Not me, sir; my vessel. No, no, sir, no shark on land or sea ever took a nip out o' Cap'n Zack Battle; my word for that, sir. And there'd be no robbery aboard the *Mystery* had I been there; my word for that as well, sir. I am not the cut that knuckles when a gun is pushed under my nose, not if I've got free flippers and feet to stand on."

"Well, suppose you come off of them for a few minutes, Captain Battle, and take a chair," said Chief Watts, curtly. "And state, with a little less waving of your flippers, what all this is about? Have you called here to report that your vessel has been robbed?"

"Aye, sir; robbed as clean as a smelt!" cried the doughty little captain, reluctantly dropping into a chair opposite his questioner, and glaring at him from under his beetling brows. "That's what I've come to report, sir; though there's little use in locking a stable door, I reckon, arter the hoss has been stole."

"When did the robbery occur?"

"Last night, sir, just afore eight bells. That's twelve o'clock in a landman's lingo."

"Where were you lying, Captain Battle?"

"Anchored in the stream, sir, off Paxton's, East Boston."

"Where are you from, and what's your cargo?"

"Cargo, sir!" cried Captain Battle, with a disdainful wave of both hands and arms. "The *Mystery's* not a freighter, sir, I'd have you know. She's a schooner yacht, sir; Mr. Richard Morton, of Winthrop, owner, sir."

"A pleasure boat?"

"Aye, sir, a pleasure boat, if one finds cruising a pleasure."

"What are the circumstances of this robbery, Captain Battle?"

"Plainly stated, sir, they are these," said Captain Battle, clapping each of his muscular thighs with his huge hands. "I put in here yesterday just afore sunset, and dropped anchor where I've said. We've moorings off Winthrop, mind you; but the tide being a bit down on the flats, I thought I'd best wait the morning flood."

"Was her owner aboard?"

"No, sir; only two fo'mast hands, and a cabin boy who keeps things trim below and

looks arter the cooking. I'd left Mr. Morton in Gloucester on a matter o' business, sir, and he was coming up by rail to-day."

"Well, what about the robbery?"

"This about it, sir! I'd given the fo'mast hands leave ashore till morning, their wives living in East Boston. A sailor always looks to see his wife when in port, sir, mebbe you know. I remained aboard till after supper, when I put ashore likewise. I'd told Mr. Morton I'd let his wife know when he'd be home, sir, as she was expecting him last night. So I made down to Winthrop and set her mind easy, and then started back for my vessel. But I ran foul o' friends in East Boston, sir, and 'twas midnight afore I reached the wharf."

"Off which your vessel was lying?"

"Aye, sir, that's it," assented Captain Battle, with a series of nods. "I whistled for the lad aboard to come in with the tender and take me off, but I'd a whistled myself dry as a smoked fish before I'd a got help from him. Arter blowing my wind for a good half-hour, sir, I nailed a ship's boat in the dock and put off by myself, thinking to send the lad back with it."

"Had he fallen asleep?"

"Sleep, no!" cried Captain Battle, furiously. "I'd have woke him with a rope's end, if I'd a found him with his peepers closed while on watch. Instead, sir, I found him tied hand and foot in one o' the fo'castle bunks, with a wad o' marlin bound 'tween his teeth, and the breath nigh out of his blooming carcass."

"He had been assaulted?"

"That's the purtiest way of putting it, I reckon," growled the seaman, with a glare. "He'd been in no fight, sir, for he'd had no chance to put up a fight, the way I'd a done."

"What had happened?"

"'Twan't a case o' happen, sir, 'twas a

case o' malice aforethought, as I've heerd it called. The lad was sitting aft, sir, on the companion slide, when the scurv'y trick was done. The first he knew of anybody aboard save himself, was when a pair of lubbers who'd silently hauled along side for'ard and boarded, clapped hands on him from behind and shoved a pistol under his very nose. 'Twan't much use i' the lad's showing fight, for it turned out they were three to one, and two'd been a plenty. The lad caved, sir, sensible like, and they soon had him i' the shape I found him."

"And they then robbed the vessel?"

"The cabin, sir," nodded Captain Battle. "They took nuthin' fo'ward, as I reckon nuthin' hit their fancy."

"What did they take from the cabin?"

"Nigh a hundred dollars from Mr. Morton's desk, with two telescopes, a night glass, a compass and quadrant, along with a batch of clothing. I am not dead sartin if that's all, sir, for I've not yet made sure what's missing. And 'twan't so much the loss, sir, seeing that Mr. Morton is a man o' means; but I'd like to lay hands on the infernal wharf rats, just to teach 'em the sort o' man I am!"

And if the expression on the tawny face of Captain Battle was at all suggestive of the result of such an encounter, the fate of the miscreants would certainly have been all that the law requires for such an offense.

Chief Watts took the man's measure a second time, and there seemed to be no occasion to doubt the story, as reports of a similar nature had recently been much too frequent; yet a significant touch from Keene's foot against his own was hardly necessary to recall their interrupted discussion.

"I've no doubt the thieves would fare badly, were you to lay hands on them, Captain Battle," Chief Watts presently rejoined.

"You bet!"

"I wish for the sake of law and order you might do so. We have been troubled with a great many of these depredations of late."

"That so, sir?"

"As well as many breaks about the wharves and along shore."

"Can't you get any track o' the thieves?" demanded Captain Battle, with the scrutiny of his piercing black eyes betraying an interest by no means unobserved by Sheridan Keene.

"Not hide nor hair of them," replied Chief Watts. "How old is your cabin boy, Captain Battle?"

"About twenty, sir."

"Then he can give us some description of his assailants."

"He says they all were men, sir; and big men at that."

"Were they in disguise?"

"Can't say as to that, sir."

"Did they wear beards?"

"I reckon he said they did, though I am not sure."

"I will have one of my officers board you during the day, Captain Battle, and take the lad's testimony, and note the character of the break," Chief Watts now said, gravely, with his gaze steadily meeting the sharp eyes of the man opposite.

"All right, sir," nodded Captain Battle. "I will not drop round to her moorings afore Mr. Morton arrives from Gloucester and comes aboard."

"Does Mr. Morton spend much of his time cruising?"

"Summit, sir."

"What is his business, Captain Battle?"

"Mining, sir. He's got interests in property i' the West."

"Pardon the interruption, chief," Sheridan Keene interposed, again touching the former's foot unobserved by Captain Battle;

"but if I am to notify Roberts about that case of Heresy, I'd better be about it."

There was no case of Heresy, and Chief Watts instantly understood that Keene had formed some opinion of the matter under consideration, and wished not only to investigate the case, but also to depart in advance of Captain Battle. The chief started slightly, pretending his mind had been recalled to the case mentioned, and said, quickly:

"You're right, Detective Keene. I'd quite forgotten it in listening to Captain Battle. You may wire Roberts to arrest Heresy on sight, without waiting to procure a warrant. Have you the officer's address?"

"I received it this morning. He is at the Dorrance, Providence."

"Send him the message at once, then."

"It will not take me over ten minutes."

Without so much as a glance at Captain Battle, Sheridan Keene quickly arose and left the room. By his mention of the time it would take him to do the errand, Chief Watts understood in a flash that Keene wanted him to detain the captain that length of time.

CHAPTER III.

KEENE MAKES A SHREWD GUESS.

Sheridan Keene had an object in leaving the office of Chief Inspector Watts in advance of Captain Battle.

The disclosure of the latter had given rise in the detective's mind to a number of suspicions which seemed worthy of, at least, a cursory investigation.

It struck Keene as being rather curious that this robbery of the *Mystery* should have occurred so quickly after his experiences with the harbor police, particularly since the owner of the vessel was a Winthrop man. It was from that quarter that the red light, with its intermittent flash,

had been observed that night; and although it had been given but little significance by the pilot, Keene somehow felt convinced that it had been a signal made with some doubtful object in view.

To most minds, however, the robbery of the *Mystery* would have exonerated that vessel's crew from reasonable suspicion. But experience had taught Sheridan Keene to be prepared for artifice on the part of criminals; and it now struck him as being quite possible that no robbery at all had occurred aboard the *Mystery*, and that this report and visit of Captain Battle were but calculated to avert the very suspicion he now was led to entertain, and that this doughty little captain had aimed also to discover if any definite mistrust existed in the minds of the police.

Hence Keene had given quiet intimation of his suspicions to Chief Watts, and left him to understand that he wished for a time, at least, to take the case in hand.

The detective did not immediately leave headquarters. First he hastened into the general room allotted to inspectors, and disguised himself sufficiently to preclude recognition by Captain Battle should he subsequently have occasion to meet him. This having been quickly done, he slipped out into Pemberton square and took a position on the court house steps, to wait until the seaman should put in an appearance.

He was not long delayed. Five minutes later Captain Battle came bustling up the stairs from the inspector's office, and started off toward the water front as fast as his stubby legs would carry him.

Sheridan Keene followed him to the South Ferry, and, boarding the boat after him, crossed to East Boston.

Just before the boat made the slip, Captain Battle took occasion to wave his long arm to a man aboard a black yacht anchored

a cable's length south, to which a response of similar character was immediately returned.

"That craft evidently is the *Mystery*," Keene decided; "and I'm inclined to believe that gesture was a signal intimating that this fiery little skipper's visit to headquarters has been entirely satisfactory to him. It's my decided impression that the *Mystery* well deserves her name."

The yacht was a trim-looking craft, with a low, black hull, schooner rigged, and presenting an eminently respectable appearance. Keene felt sure that Chief Watts would detail no other officer on the case prior to receiving his report, and he now resolved that he would give Mr. Richard Morton's boat a visit a little later.

At the end of another half-hour, Captain Battle left in Winthrop a car he had taken in East Boston, and hustled away in the direction of Winthrop Heights.

Keene followed fifty feet behind, and saw him ring at the door of a large wooden residence half-hidden amid a clump of trees, and receive admission to the house.

"It's odds that is Morton's dwelling," he decided. "I'll try to get a look at it from the rear."

He walked by the house, which occupied an elevated site on the long stretch of bluff; and, taking a side avenue an eighth of a mile beyond, a short walk brought him sharply upon the water front.

A glance over the magnificent prospect served to augment his suspicions. The rear of the house into which Captain Battle had disappeared was within fifty yards of the break of the high bluff. Below lay the waters of Boston Harbor, with Apple Island in plain view; while, far away in the distance, Fort Independence and the waters of President Roads were easily discernible, the scene of the incidents of two nights before.

More than ever convinced that he was on the track of some sort of knavery, the detective now retraced his steps, and started for the nearest point at which he could take a return car. On his way he encountered a local policeman, and decided that this would be a safe person of whom to make inquiries concerning Morton. Yet he, by habit, was too shrewd to betray himself, and he said merely, when they met:

"I'm looking for a party named Morton, Mr. Officer. Can you tell me where he lives?"

The officer gave him a quick, semi-suspicious glance.

"What's his first name, Richard?" he demanded.

"I guess that's it, sir."

"I ought to know where he lives, since he's my brother-in-law," said the patrolman, bluntly.

Keene fancied neither the look in the man's eye nor the tone of his voice, and the discovery of the relationship mentioned led him instantly to make a tack.

"I'm not sure his name is Richard," he now said, doubtfully, "I think I have heard him called Ben. The man I'm looking for is a caulker, and works in one of the shipyards in East Boston. He said he could get me a job, but I don't know just where he works; only that he lives somewhere in Winthrop."

"Well, he's not the man I have in mind," rejoined the officer, curtly. "I don't know any caulker by the name of Morton, nor any other name, as far as that goes. You can find a directory at the drug store yonder. Like as not that'll tell you."

"Thank you, sir," said Keene nodding soberly, and moving away with a well-feigned air of dismal uncertainty.

Yet he was saying to himself

"By jove! that fellow don't look right. I

would wager there's a black streak in him somewhere. This mystery may be a deal broader and deeper than I have imagined."

Now fully resolved to go to the bottom of it, however deep it might prove to be, Keene hastened to take a car and return to East Boston.

Half an hour later he made his way down the wharf opposite which the *Mystery* lay at anchor, and whistled shrilly through his fingers to a man whom he saw lolling on her forward deck. The fellow heard and looked shoreward, and Keene beckoned for him to come and take him off.

The seaman hesitated for several minutes, but finally decided to comply. He boarded a tender swinging aft on the tide, and rowed slowly to the wharf.

"Did you whistle to me, sir?" he demanded, as he swung the boat round and stared up at the man on the pier.

"That's the schooner *Mystery*, isn't it?" returned Keene, at once sizing up the boatman to be all that his grim face and distrustful eyes indicated.

"Aye, sir, that's her name."

"Well, back up here and take me aboard," said Keene, curtly. "I'm an inspector of police. Your captain's been up to headquarters and reported a theft from his vessel. I want to question your cabin boy, and look the evidence over."

The boatman's grim expression immediately relaxed.

"Oh, all right, sir!" he now exclaimed, sending the boat's stern to the pier. "I didn't know you, sir; and the cap'n not being aboard, I'd no business to take off a stranger. It's all right, sir. Come aboard."

Keene clambered down into the stern-sheets, and sat in silence while the seaman bent to his oars and sent the light tender spinning over the oily water. Before she had run alongside the larger craft, two other

men had appeared from below, one of whom was a youngster of twenty, with a thin, swarthy face and crafty gray eyes. His companion was a man of forty, dark-visaged, and had his left arm in a sling. All three wore blue sailor trousers and woolen shirts, and their general character, if pictured in their faces, was by no means commendable.

Sheridan Keene gave no sign of observing any of this. He scrambled over the vessel's rail and sprang down on deck, at once addressing those aboard.

"Which of you was the man assaulted by harbor thieves last night?" he demanded.

"I was, sir," said the younger, stepping forward and touching his canvas hat.

"What is your name?"

"Martin Fales, sir."

"Is your home in East Boston?"

"Yes, sir; on Liverpool street."

"Take me below. I want to visit the cabin."

"Aye, aye, sir; come this way."

"Where were you when the assault was made, young man?"

"I was seated here, sir, in the companion-way."

"What were you doing?"

"It was watching the ferry boat make the slip yonder, sir, when the men seized me."

"You had not heard them come aboard?"

"No, sir. The first I knew, they had me on both sides; and one of 'em shoved a gun under my nose, and told me to keep still or he'd blow my head off."

"And you obeyed?"

"I thought I'd best, sir, since I wanted to keep my head a while longer."

"What happened then?"

"They tied me hand and foot, sir," replied Fales, displaying his swollen wrists, which still bore the laceration of the lines with which he had been secured. "Then they gagged me and chucked me into a bunk fo'ard, and shut me below. There wasn't

much need of the gag, sir, for I'd not have been heard from down there if I'd yelled my lungs out."

"Was it sufficiently light for you to easily distinguish your assailants?"

"No, sir; I only know that they were pretty big men, and all wore beards."

"Did you hear any names mentioned?"

"No, sir," and Fales shook his head. "They didn't say much afore getting me below. What happened after that, I can't say."

"Take me below."

The lad led the way down the companion-way and into the cabin. Like the rest of the vessel it was neat in appearance, and utterly void of anything calculated to create suspicion. Keene briefly looked the place over, and pushed open the door of a small state-room on the port side.

"That's Mr. Morton's room, sir," explained Fales. "The starboard one is used by Cap'n Battle."

"Was this the desk that was robbed?"

"Yes, sir."

It was a small affair, and evidently had been forced open with a chisel, as the wood-work about the lock was split away. So far as indications went, the robbery appeared to have been a genuine occurrence; and, if the contrary was the fact, the evidence and the stories of the several parties involved in the deception had been carefully pre-arranged.

But Sheridan Keene had expected nothing less than this, and he still cleaved to his suspicions.

"Captain Battle's coming aboard now, sir," said Fales, when Keene re-entered the cabin. "I just heard him whistle from the pier."

"Mr. Morton is away, I understand?" said Keene, inquiringly.

"We left him in Gloucester yesterday, sir; but he was coming up this morning."

"It now is nearly noon. Possibly he already has arrived."

"Like enough, sir."

The fact that Captain Battle had again had a mission to Morton's house, after having been there the night before, led Keene to doubt if Morton had in reality remained in Gloucester; and he resolved to add this also to his suspicions, providing he now found him in company with the captain. His misgivings proved to be well founded. When he returned to the deck a few minutes later, after subjecting Martin Fales to a few more questions, Captain Battle was coming over the vessel's side accompanied by a tall, well-dressed man of about forty, who at once hastened aft.

"My man informs me that you are one of the city inspectors, sir," he said, politely, as he approached the detective. "I am Mr. Morton, the owner of this boat, and Captain Battle, my skipper, tells me has suffered a robbery."

He extended his hand while speaking, and Sheridan Keene met him half way.

"Yes, Mr. Morton," he said, gravely. "I have been questioning your cabin boy, and seeing what I could make of the affair."

"That's right, inspector! What do you find?"

"Nothing that gives me any clue to the thieves, sir, I am sorry to say."

"Well, well, that's too bad," smiled Morton, drawing up his tall figure. "But the loss is not very heavy, Captain Battle tells me, and I guess I shall weather it. I am short a hand as the result of the robbery, one of my men having sprained his wrist; but if there is any help I can give you in your effort to locate the thieves, I beg that you'll command me."

Keene meantime had sized the man up more closely. His manner was that of a gentleman of means and culture. There was nothing in his voice nor his utterances to have occasioned distrust; yet the peculiar

coldness of his searching gray eyes, and a certain constraint with which he repeatedly smiled, led this shrewd detective to regard him with serious misgivings.

"You may mail to headquarters an inventory covering your loss, Mr. Morton, if you please," he replied, gravely.

"I will do so this very afternoon, sir. I shall remain at anchor here until morning."

"If we have a list we may be able to locate some of the property, in case it is pawned, and that, possibly, may lead to a discovery of the thieves," Keene explained, signing to one of the crew to bring the tender alongside.

But he already had in mind a far different and more daring method by which, should his suspicions prove correct, he was resolved to discover the real criminals.

He shook hands with both Mr. Morton and Captain Battle, and having boarded the tender, was rowed ashore.

CHAPTER IV.

SHERIDAN KEENE'S STRATEGY.

Not far from four o'clock that afternoon, a man roughly clad in a soiled gray suit and woolen shirt, and whose repulsive features wore a hue as dark as that of a mulatto, made his way to the end of the pier at which the harbor police boat then was secured, and unceremoniously sprang aboard of her.

Sergeant Henry was seated alone abaft the main house, and, abruptly rising, he waved the fellow off.

"You're not allowed aboard here," he called, sharply. "Get back to the wharf."

But the intruder did not obey. He swaggered aft, as ferocious-looking a dog as ever trod a vessel's deck, and demanded with threatening insolence:

"Ain't this a government craft?"

"Suppose she is?" sternly rejoined the sergeant, feeling for the club under his coat.

"Well, I've come aboard for a sail, d'ye see?" cried the ruffian. "I am a citizen, and I help support the government; and if this ere's a government craft, I'm blowed if I don't have one trip aboard her, or I'll know the reason why."

"You'll have a trip to the tombs, my man, if you're not off this boat within a half-minute," cried Sergeant Henry, with an ominous fire beginning to show in his dark eyes.

"D'ye think you can put me off?"

"I don't think," cried the sergeant; "I know I can!"

He was at the ruffian with a bound, as he spoke, and the club he had raised would surely have cracked the skull of a less alert and agile man than the one assailed. Before it could fall, even, the ruffian had caught both of Sergeant Henry's wrists, and pinned them to his sides with a grip that held him powerless.

"What d'ye say now, sergeant?" he leered, maliciously, with his ugly face thrust directly in the sergeant's nose. "D'ye say yer can put me ashore? I am going to let go of you now——"

"You scoundrel——"

"But I say, Henry," and the ugly face changed abruptly, and a laugh rose from the speaker's lips; "when I let go, don't crack me on the pate with that locust, for you'll hit one of your best friends."

"Good Heavens!" cried the sergeant, amazedly; "it's Sheridan Keene!"

Keene dropped to a seat on the tugboat rail, and joined in the laugh with which his friend now relished the joke.

"I was making sure only that my disguise was effective," he presently explained. "I said to myself, if Sergeant Henry doesn't recognize me, no one will, and that ought to be good enough."

"But what means this masquerading, Shed?" laughed the sergeant, perplexedly.

"It is one of the results of our little voyage of night before last."

"You don't mean," exclaimed the sergeant, with eyes lighting eagerly, "that you have discovered a clue to these shore front mysteries?"

"A possible clue, yes," nodded Keene. "But I am working upon conjectures only, and conjectures are infernally poor evidence to offer a judge and jury."

"That's right, too."

"I must have something more definite and conclusive, sergeant, and I have come to ask for your co-operation in a little tragedy I've planned for the purpose of securing it."

"Glad enough you have."

"You know we were discussing that matter the other night."

"True, Keene; and you may be sure I'll lend a hand in any move you originate."

"Thanks, sergeant."

"What have you discovered, and what are the grounds for your suspicion?"

Sheridan Keene left the rail and drew a seat nearer that of his companion. It took but a brief time for him to explain the situation, and most of what had occurred to arouse his suspicions; and he found in Sergeant Henry an interested and approving hearer.

"You're a credit to the force, Keene," said the other, warmly, when the detective had concluded. "Now what strategy are you about to attempt, in order to secure more conclusive evidence?"

"Well, sergeant, I heard Morton say this morning that he was short-handed aboard his vessel."

"And you're going to try to sign with him?"

"I am going to make a bid for a bunk in the *Mystery's* fore-castle, sergeant; there's no doubt about that."

"If your suspicions are justified, you will

be taking your life in your hand by this step."

"That's a part of my business," said Keene, indifferently. "I am resolved to know the truth concerning that craft, if it costs me limb or life."

"Can you prevail upon Battle to employ you?"

"I am not going to try," laughed Keene.

"Not try?"

"I am going to put the boot on the other leg, and make him prevail on me to join him."

"How can you accomplish that?" demanded the sergeant, curiously.

"By throwing myself in his way in a proper fashion."

"Well, you look like a ruffian," laughed Henry; "but I'm blessed if I guess your design."

"I will tell you my plan a little later," Keene rejoined. "Just now I wish to assume it will be a success, and that I shall land aboard of her. I first wish to arrange our plan of co-operation, in case I should succeed in doing so."

"You already have the plan matured, then?"

"Yes."

"Explain it to me, Keene, and I will follow your instructions."

"Thanks; that's very kind of you."

"Wise, rather! What's your idea?"

"My idea is to establish myself aboard the *Mystery*, and remain there until I secure all the evidence I require to warrant an arrest and insure a conviction."

"That may take some little time."

"I expect it will."

"And what do you wish me to do, meantime?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied Keene, "except to keep an eye on the vessel when she is about the harbor, and, at the same

time, do so in a way that will not tend to arouse suspicion aboard of her."

"I will insure that much."

"You'll readily know whether I am on board of her; for, if I am not, I'll send you word."

"If I get no word, I shall assume that you are there."

"In which case," continued Keene, "leave the investigation to me, and make sure you take no action against the craft unless you receive a prearranged signal from me."

"What signal may I expect?"

"You know the *Mystery* by sight, do you not?"

"Perfectly well."

"She is a black schooner——"

"Oh, I know her, Keene!" interposed the sergeant. "I have seen her off and on all the season."

"Very good," said Keene, approvingly. "Now as to the signal. I shall make it a point to avert any suspicions tending to involve and imperil me, yet one never can foresee what may possibly occur. In event of personal danger, or in case I already have secured the desired evidence, I will take the first occasion when the *Mystery* is under sail and your tug is in sight, to let you know that I want help."

"In a nutshell, you then wish me to run the craft down and board her," interposed Sergeant Henry.

"Precisely."

"I'll do that, I assure you."

"And keep an eye on her at all times when she is under sail in the harbor?"

"Never doubt that, Keene, if I know you to be aboard. Now what signal may I expect, in case you wish me to dip my hand into the mess?"

"This," said Keene, earnestly. "I will take an opportunity when the time is ripe, and cut one of the forward sheets, either that

of the jib or foresail, and set the canvas flapping. Should you see that occur, sergeant, you may assume either that I am in peril of my life, or that I want the schooner overhauled and hove to before she can make her moorings. Is it perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly so, Shed."

"Then the ground is covered as far as that goes," said the detective. "Now, then, I will inform you by what design I expect to establish my relations with that hot-headed Captain Battle."

Keene thereupon described his plan in detail, but its execution did not occur till several hours later.

At about ten o'clock that night, when the Boston-bound ferry boat left the East Boston slip, two men were standing outside the port cabin, gazing over the rail at the churning waves abaft the port wheel.

The two men were Sheridan Keene and Sergeant Henry.

The former wore a pair of handcuffs, attached only to his left wrist.

On the opposite side of the boat were two other men, inspectors of police, and several passengers who had no interest in the doings, nor even recognized these officers of the law.

A hundred yards to the south the black schooner *Mystery* still lay at anchor, with her spars discernible against the dark sky. A lantern hung in her fore shrouds, and the cabin windows were illumined, indicating that Captain Battle was probably aboard and had not retired for the night.

As the ferry boat left the slip the ebbing tide caught her, cutting her to the south; whereupon the pilot threw her stern still nearer the motionless schooner.

It was the moment that Sheridan Keene was awaiting.

"Are you ready, sergeant?" he asked, quietly.

"All ready, Shed," replied the sergeant, and his voice had a curious quiver.

"Good-by, then!"

"Good-by, and God speed you!"

Sheridan Keene drew back his arm, and apparently dealt the speaker a blow that sent him reeling to the deck. Then, with a single bound, the daring detective gained the rail and plunged headforemost into the surging waters below.

Instantly all was confusion on the after deck, and excited cries broke from both detectives, in which Sergeant Henry himself speedily joined:

"Man overboard! Man overboard!"

"Stop the boat!"

"Sing out to the pilot! Oh, oh, there's a man drowning!"

"Throw a line; a life-preserver! Anything!"

These were some of the cries which almost immediately rang loudly over the dark waters, and in the excitement and confusion which ensued there doubtless were some who would, indeed, have thrown anything to the man supposed to be drowning, even a flatiron or a brick.

Before the alarm reached the ears of the pilot, however, the boat was well into the stream, and far beyond view of the detective, whatever his fate.

The cumbersome boat put back to the spot, and the throng of passengers stared and vainly strained their eyes to penetrate the gloom; but of Sheridan Keene neither sight nor sound could be had.

"He has gone to the bottom," some declared.

Others asked:

"Who was he? Did any one know the man?"

Then Sergeant Henry offered an explanation.

"He was a prisoner I was taking to Bos-

ton, and a very desperate fellow. I had him handcuffed, I thought, but he must have freed one of his wrists; for he knocked me down with one hand, and sprang overboard. Here's a devil of a mess for me, I reckon!"

With this disclosure of the unfortunate man's character, the interest in his fate abated.

The gong in the engine-room rang the signal to go ahead.

The plunge of the piston sent a quiver through the cumbersome craft; the motionless wheels took up their lost revolutions, the boat made way again; and again the original routine of human affairs was resumed.

About the only audible reminder of the tragedy was the maudlin voice of an intoxicated fellow, who observed with a drunken gravity not wholly void of humor:

"Poor devil! P'raps he'sh better off!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RESULT OF THE RUSE.

Only an officer of considerable daring and indomitable resolution would have taken so hazardous a step as that taken by Detective Sheridan Keene in order to successfully execute a design against men of whom suspicion only was entertained.

But Keene had been a veritable water-dog in his early years, and could swim like a duck; hence the peril of a plunge from the ferry boat did not appeal to him very seriously.

The moment he struck the water the surge from under the wheels swept him astern, and the ebb of the tide cut him down stream. Anxious, most of all, to escape observation, he quickly struck out from the wake of the boat, and swam with powerful strokes in the direction of the dark schooner lying fifty yards to the south.

Having quickly covered half the distance,

he then shaped a course toward the middle of the stream; and presently settled lower in the water and waited developments.

The obscurity of the night favored his design. He saw the boat put back, and heard the cries from her after deck, and laughed within himself at the efforts that were being made to effect his rescue. Dark figures moving to and fro were discernible aboard the *Mystery* also, and evidently the disturbance had reached the ears of her captain and crew.

Keene had foreseen all this, and it suited his design to the letter.

"I reckon I shall fool them," he said to himself, paddling only sufficiently to keep himself afloat. "The sergeant has played his part in the drama very cleverly."

Presently the ferry-boat resumed her way, and as the tide then was sweeping him out of the course he had in view, Keene silently struck out again in the direction of the schooner. By swimming cautiously, he succeeded in approaching the craft unobserved by those on board, and working alongside until he could clutch the bobstays, he supported himself in the water and listened.

Captain Battle and the three members of the crew still were on deck amidships, and evidently had rightly inferred what had transpired on the ferry-boat, their gaze still searching the dark waters over the starboard side, as if in hopes of discovering the person presumably fallen into the bay.

"I reckon he's gone to Davy Jones' right enough," growled Captain Battle, a moment later. "Tain't much use in looking for him."

"Still he might show up, sir," returned one of the men. "I'll put off in the tender, if you say so, sir. If we could locate the stiff, there might be a dollar in it, or like as not some jewelry."

"The chance isn't worth the trouble," snarled Captain Battle. "He'll hug bottom

for days, if he's gone down for the last time. No, Staggers, there's nothing in putting out with a boat."

"All right, sir."

"I'd take profits from the stiff as readily as you, my man; but I reckon we'll both have to do without 'em."

If he had had any doubts concerning the evil character of these men, such remarks as these then reaching Keene's ears would have assured him, not only of their despicable natures, but also of the reception he might expect at their hands. He delayed no longer, but at once cried hoarsely, feigning an exhaustion he was far from feeling:

"I say, messmates! Lend a covey a hand, will you?"

"Hello!" growled Captain Battle, wheeling sharply about and staring forward. "What the devil was that?"

"The fellow's not gone down!" cried Staggers, starting forward. "He's under our bow, sir, with a grip on the bobstays."

All hands hastened forward, and the inference of Mr. Staggers was speedily verified. The dark figure of Keene was plainly discernible under the overhang of the bow.

"Take a covey aboard till he gets his wind, will you," he panted, quickly, on seeing the faces above him. "I can't make the shore till I get a bit o' rest, and shake off my chill."

"Hang on, there!" exclaimed Captain Battle, readily. "Over with you, Martin, and pass the end of the jib-sheet under his arms!"

"No need o' that, cap'n," Keene hoarsely cried. "Just lend me a hand down here, and I can haul myself to the stay and board you."

"Wait a bit!" cried Staggers, who was the man who had taken him from the wharf that morning. "Wait a bit and I'll be with you."

He laid himself out on the bowsprit while

speaking, and reaching down his long arm seized Keene by the wrist, and hauled him to the stay. A moment more and the detective, who easily could have accomplished the feat unaided, had gained the bulwarks and stood on the forward deck.

"What the devil's this?" cried Captain Battle, instantly observing the clinking handcuff dangling from Keene's left wrist. "Have you given a bluebottle the slip?"

Keene impulsively thrust the hand under his dripping coat, much as if he had forgotten the incriminating object; and returned with well-feigned misgivings the curious stare of the several men confronting him.

"Aye, sir, that's what's happened," he reluctantly admitted, in hoarse and doubtful tones. "I'd not have taken the chance o' boarding you, only I was so chilled I feared I'd go down afore I could make the shore. Bunkin' in jail beats bunkin' along with the crabs, as far as that goes; and if you throw me by the board, and give me up ag'in——"

"Give you up ——!" interrupted Captain Battle, with a ludicrous expression of amazement on his grim face. "That's not like us, my lad! Come aft here and fire a ball of rum into your face. It'll set your blood moving, and I've a notion to hear what you'll say."

With which, Captain Battle bustled away aft, giving Mr. Staggers a hurried command to bring some dry garments into the cabin, and led Sheridan Keene below.

"Come out o' those togs, my hearty," he growled, while he produced a bottle of Santa Cruz rum and a glass from the locker. "I'll fit you out with dry ones, and this 'ere stuff'll drive out your chill as a ferret rids a house of rats. Down it, lad, and shake those togs for some that Staggers will lend you."

The scheme was working precisely as Keene had anticipated, yet he played his part without a sign of the exultation he secretly enjoyed.

Dashing off a stiff drink of the liquor, which, as a matter of fact, was quite welcome, he quickly divested himself of his dripping garments and put on a suit the foremast hand tossed down the companion-way. Meantime, Captain Battle continued his questions, while the manacle still hung clinking from the detective's wrist, a most significant suggestion of an evil character, and an effective voucher to the statements he made.

"What's your name, my lad?" was the skipper's first question, when Keene accepted the proffered drink.

"Haley, sir," was the detective's reply. "Jim Haley."

"D'ye live about here?"

"Down Newburyport way."

"What were you in irons for?"

"Cracking a crib in Ipswich," admitted Keene, with feigned reluctance. "I was nabbed by a detective down at Crescent Beach this afternoon, and he was taking me into Boston. But I worked my right hand free just afore boarding the ferry, and so I took a chance of getting away by cracking him back of the ear and jumping overboard. But I was nigh gone, sir, when I caught your bobstays. Could I have another drink?"

"Aye, have it and welcome!" exclaimed Captain Battle. "Make it a long one, and you'll soon be off your shiver. Here, Martin, wring out these togs and hang 'em in the shrouds."

And the bustling little skipper tossed Keene's wet garments to the deck, and returned to perch himself on the broad cushions, and stare with manifest enjoyment and satisfaction at the hang-dog countenance of the detective, who now had taken a seat on the opposite side, clad in the rough attire loaned him.

"How are you feeling now?" grimly de-

manded the former, who would have been more than man had he not been deceived by Keene's clever assumption.

"Like a boat with bottom new-leded," replied Keene, with a decidedly evil smile.

"You talk like a man used to a boat."

"I've cruised about some."

"Can you man a sheet or haul a halliard in fair weather?"

"Aye, sir, or in foul."

"Good for ye!" nodded Captain Battle, with evident satisfaction. "What course d'ye mean to shape arter leaving here?"

"Then you don't mean to give me up to the police?" asked Keene, eagerly.

"D'ye think this looks like it?"

"Well, I'd an idea you might not, sir. Still, I could not feel sure."

"Well, you may feel sure," growled Captain Battle, sitting Turk fashion on the cushions and caressing with energy his stubby thighs. "I've no mind to turn you down, my hearty, and, afore long, I'll file that infernal iron off your wrist. But I ask again, what course d'ye mean shaping after leaving here?"

Keene dismally shook his head.

"I've no mind as to that, sir," he replied. "The same old course, I reckon."

"Got any dust?"

"The detectiyes took all I had, sir; and 'twan't much."

"I take it you're not over-particular how you turn a dollar," observed Captain Battle, regarding him sharply. "Am I right?"

"Not far from right, I reckon," Keene slowly admitted. "I'm wanted in two places now, sir, and I guess I'll have to set sail for new waters."

"What would you say, Mr. Haley, to a job aboard this 'ere craft?"

"D'ye mean it?"

"I can use a hand aboard here, if he is the right sort of a man."

"Well, sir, I'm afeared I'd not suit," said Keene, craftily.

"Why not, d'ye think?"

"Since you know the sort of covey I am, sir, it's not likely you'd have a berth for me."

"I'm not so sartin about that," returned Captain Battle, with a significant light in his sharp black eyes. "You'd take orders and obey 'em, wouldn't you?"

"Aye, sir, I'd do that or go over the side again," said Keene, with a quick nod.

"Orders afloat or ashore, eh?"

"'Twouldn't matter to me, sir! Most I think of now, sir, is dodging the police."

"And if I'd make sure you were kept safe and under cover, my lad, would you take chances along with Captain Battle and his men?"

"Would a duck swim, sir?" Keene instantly returned. "Those are better chances than I'd find elsewhere, I reckon, and the berth's softer'n I've been used to of late. Aye, yes, I'd take a job o' that kind along with you, if I could get it."

"And ask no questions?"

"What need o' questions, when a man's in easy sailing? If you mean what you say, sir, I'll lay to aboard here and take your orders without a word."

"That's good enough for now," said Captain Battle, straightening his short legs and springing down to the cabin floor. "Tip us your fin for a binder, and then we'll go for'ard and have this iron snaked off your wrist."

"And I'm to stay aboard, sir?" demanded Keene, with an artful display of great satisfaction.

"For now, at least," nodded Captain Battle, shaking him by the hand. "Come for'ard and I'll knock you down to the crew. And mind you," he added, with a sudden, ferocious scowl; "you'll invite wuss'n what

you've escaped, if you show the first sign o' crossing my hawser! D'ye understand?"

"Aye, sir, I understand as well as any man would need to," was the significant rejoinder. "I'll take all the chance any o' you'll take, and it'll not be the first time."

"And my orders go, mind you, afloat or ashore!"

"That's good enough for me, sir!" said Keene, decisively.

And Captain Battle already had made up his mind that this young ruffian was good enough for him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JOB IN HINGHAM.

If Captain Battle or his employer, Mr. Richard Morton, had any misgivings concerning the latest acquisition to the crew of the *Mystery*, they were quite effectually dispelled by the stories published next morning in all of the Boston daily newspapers.

Under glaring leaders, there appeared glowing accounts of the fatality of the previous night, of the vicious assault upon one of the city inspectors, of the escape of one James Haley, a much-wanted thief and desperado, and of his probable fate in attempting to evade imprisonment by leaping from the ferry-boat into the waters of Boston harbor.

These stories were, of course, a part of the strategy of the detectives, and they had the desired effect. About ten o'clock, both Morton and Captain Battle came aboard the *Mystery* and showed Keene one of the papers, at the same time congratulating him in significant terms upon his daring escape from the police.

"They now think you've gone to Davy Jones," was Captain Battle's eminently satisfactory conclusion. "And thinking that, my man, they'll leave your carcass to feed the fishes, and look no further for you.

You're as safe from now out, Mr. Haley, as a man well could ask."

From that moment Sheridan Keene felt that his position was assured and his daring assumption unsuspected. He was subjected to a close questioning by Morton, however, concerning his past career and his ability as a seaman; but the detective was eminently capable of sustaining the part he was playing.

"I guess the man is all right, cap'n, and we surely can find a use for him," dryly observed Morton when finally he went aft with his skipper.

"'Fore Heaven, sir, he's a dead lucky find!" vouchsafed Captain Battle, in reply. "Since Porter went lame i' the arm, we're deucedly short-handed."

"And that Hingham job is down for the first of the week."

"True, sir; the which can't be pulled off unless this man consents to——"

But the balance was lost to the hearing of the man in question, yet Sheridan Keene could easily conjecture the nature of the job to which reference had been made.

That afternoon the *Mystery* got under way, and, with Richard Morton aboard, a short run was made down the harbor, then back to the vessel's moorings under Winthrop heights. The readiness with which Keene adapted himself to his duties appeared to satisfy both owner and skipper; and, shortly after making the moorings, Morton was set ashore and went up to the house which Keene had observed the previous morning. It now was very evident to the detective that he was on a decidedly promising trail, and there remained only to discover that absolute evidence which would insure a conviction in court.

Twice during the afternoon's sail he had sighted the harbor police tug, *Watchman*, and Keene felt sure that each move made by

the schooner was being discreetly watched by Sergeant Henry. The former now was more than anxious for any operations which would serve to fully expose the men with whom he so cleverly had become associated.

Not until the following Tuesday, however, was the job attempted which Keene had heard mentioned, and for which he impatiently had waited.

About two o'clock that day Morton came down to the shore, and for nearly an hour sat upon the rocks in company with Captain Battle, the two evidently discussing some matter of more than ordinary importance. Their interview ended, Captain Battle shook hands with his employer, and immediately boarded the tender and pulled out to the schooner.

"Whatever is coming off, Morton evidently doesn't figure in it," decided Keene.

He had been indifferently watching them from the forward deck. Up to that time, although the crew had made friendly with him, he had not received the slightest intimation of anything wrong. The injury suffered by Porter, who was one of the deck hands, was not a fake, and his right arm was badly swollen.

Morton had been aboard but once in the three days; and, in as far as outward appearances then went, the *Mystery* was as innocent and reputable a craft as floated in Boston harbor.

Things took the expected turn that afternoon, however. The moment Captain Battle set foot over the side, he bawled lustily:

"Stand by to get under way! Aft here, two of you, and davit this tender! Stops off the lower sails only! Look lively, you lubbers!"

Whatever the project, Captain Battle went at it with more life than he had exhibited for days. Within a half-dozen minutes the tender hung from the davits, stays had been

cast off, and the mainsail and jib were standing and flapping lustily in the southwest breeze.

"Man the fore halliards!" yelled Captain Battle, taking the wheel. "Hoist away lively! Stand by to cast off, Martin! Hoist away there, you dogs! Now make fast! Haul your jib sheet close till she wears off—now ease away! Let go, Martin! Trim close fore and aft!"

The successive orders were executed with the alacrity of men weary of idleness; and, as the last fell from the skipper's lips, the schooner filled away on the starboard tack, and with lower canvas bellying in the whole-sail breeze, stood sharp down the harbor in the direction of President Roads.

"Where are we bound, d'ye know?" Keene asked of Porter, a little later.

"I never know till we reach port," was the evasive reply.

Gazing away over the water rail, the detective now beheld a familiar craft in the far distance, and easily could imagine whither the eyes of those aboard were at that moment turned. It was the harbor police boat, *Watchman*, steaming down the bay toward Thompson's Island.

But the destination of the *Mystery* long remained a conjecture. Within an hour she had passed Point Allerton, and was standing straight away down the south shore. In another hour Minot's Ledge Light was abeam, and still Captain Battle stood grimly at the wheel, with a pipe in his mouth, and his dark countenance as inscrutable as that of a sphinx.

At six o'clock there came a change, and Sheridan Keene presently guessed the object of this long reach from home. It was to blind chance observers as to the schooner's destination.

"For'ard there!" bawled Captain Battle. "Man your sheets to come about! Hard-a-lee!"

The vessel rounded into the wind smartly, the slatting sails swinging inboard and outboard, then filled on the starboard deck; and the *Mystery*, well worthy her name, stood away to the north.

"Come aft here, Haley, and do a trick at the wheel," shouted Captain Battle. "Serve supper, Martin, and no grog till arter the job is done!"

Keene hastened aft and relieved the grim-visaged skipper of the wheel. He had no doubt of being able to handle the vessel, the wind having waned with the decline of the sun; and, as he took the position Captain Battle vacated, the latter asked, shortly:

"D'ye mean all you said to me that first night i' the cabin?"

Keene knew well enough what this question prefaced, and immediately rejoined:

"Ay, sir, I do."

"You'll obey orders afloat and ashore?"

"As prompt as any man aboard here, sir."

"Good for ye! D'ye guess where we are bound?"

"I don't, sir; and I've no mind that cares."

"We shall round Point Allerton again after dark, and stand into Hingham just afore midnight."

"Ay, sir?"

"There's a little errand we have on hand at Hingham and it will be right in your line, my covey. Now, d'ye know what it is?"

"I'd be a galley-cook if I didn't guess there was some crooked job to be done in Hingham, since you've gone twenty miles out o' your course, and returned to put in there at midnight," said Keene, instantly.

"And you'll be ordered to lend a hand to it," added Captain Battle.

Keene's eyes left those of the skipper only to glance over the course ahead.

"I've said I'd take orders and obey 'em, sir," he replied.

"If there was a crib to be cracked?" said the skipper, inquiringly.

"Well, sir," rejoined Keene, "you'd have no better hand aboard here than mine, nor readier hand, to crack it, sir."

Captain Battle's grim face relaxed quickly, and he thrust out his huge hand.

"Put it there!" he cried, warmly. "You know now what cut o' men you're in with, and I told Morton for sure that we could bank on your lending a hand and sharing the gain."

"I'll do the one as heartily as the other, Captain Battle, my word for it," said Keene, shaking the powerful little fellow by the hand.

It was dark before they rounded Point Allerton.

It was midnight before they tied up at a small isolated wharf near the town of Hingham.

Though the jib was lowered and left without stays, only the fore and main gaffs were dropped, and the sails left standing.

"That's in case we need to make off in a hurry," Battle explained to Sheridan Keene, as they left the vessel. "Potter remains aboard; but the rest of us have the job to do. Silence, now, and come after me!"

Less than ten minutes later, the four men approached from the rear a large wooden building, the lower floor of which was occupied by two stores, one a jewelry store. Evidently the latter was the object of this night's expedition, for Mr. Staggers placed upon the ground a heavy bundle he had brought, and Captain Battle produced a dark lantern.

"Slip round to the front, Martin," he whispered; "and see how things look."

The youngster stole round to the front street, and presently returned to announce that all was quiet. Staggers, meantime, had opened the bundle and produced a burglar's outfit of tools.

"Lend a hand here, Haley?" growled Captain Battle.

Keene readily complied. He had no wish to effect an arrest that night. There was much more to be discovered than what he yet had learned, and by sustaining his present relations with these marauders was the speediest and surest way.

"Help break away that shutter," whis-

pered the skipper, slipping a tool into Keene's hand. "Here, Staggers, on this side, while I flash the glim."

"Easy, you fool!" growled Staggers, as the tool in Keene's hand grated noisily on the bolt.

"Dry up!" muttered the detective. "D'ye think I am a green hand on a job of this kind? Back away, and I'll do the whole thing for yer!"

As he spoke, he slipped into Captain Battle's hand the bolt he had drawn; and after brief delay, and some assistance from Fales, the heavy shutter was removed and lowered to the ground, and a square window exposed to view.

Captain Battle flashed the glare of the lantern within, and discovered a small rear office, with a desk and safe.

"Just as Morton stated!" he whispered, softly. "Now a light of glass, Martin!"

With dexterity born of practice, the youngster attached a wet leather sucker to one of the panes, and in a twinkling had cut round it with a glazier's diamond, and removed a section of the pane. Thrusting in an arm, he silently shot the catch, and Staggers quietly opened the window.

"In with you, Martin," whispered Battle, aiding the lad over the sill. "Here's the lantern, boy! Take a look about."

Martin Fales now disappeared into the gloomy shop, and was absent for full five minutes. When he returned, he beckoned only, and did not speak. Instantly Staggers passed in his tools and entered, followed quickly by Battle and Sheridan Keene. It was a new experience to the detective, that both of working with and against a gang of midnight robbers.

"Now keep your ears open, Martin, while we get to work," said Captain Battle, pushing the lad out of the office and into the shop. "Hold this lantern, Haley, and flash the glare on the safe door while—hark, what was that?"

"What's what?" muttered Staggers, starting up from his knees at the safe.

For a moment they listened intently.

"Nothing!" whispered the captain, relieving his impulsive grip upon Keene's arm. "Get at it, Staggers!"

Then a cry, thrilling the blood of all, rang through the shop.

"Make off, mates! We are discovered!"

It came from the lips of Martin Fales, and was followed by a pistol shot, and a flash of light from the front shop.

Both Keene and Captain Battle ran in that direction.

Martin Fales was struggling furiously with a burly figure, partly visible in the darkness.

At a bound, Sheridan Keene was by the side of the youth, and his arm shot out from his shoulder, dealing the lad's assailant a blow that felled him senseless to the floor.

"Be off!" roared Keene, thrusting the lad toward the rear window. "I will follow! Be off! They're up overhead!"

Heavy steps were heard on the floor above. Windows were being thrown open. Shouts were ringing through the front street. That escape only was left them, one and all of these burglars immediately realized.

Keene was the last to emerge from the window, and Captain Battle already had set him down as a hero.

A moment later they were tearing across lots toward the wharf; but the direction of their flight had been discovered, and a half-dozen men were in pursuit.

"Step lively!" cried Captain Battle. "We must get the vessel under way afore they can board her! Shoot 'em, if need be; but only on a last pinch."

They arrived at the wharf one minute in advance of their pursuers; but the minute did not suffice in which to get the *Mystery* under way, and a long, fierce combat ensued on the pier.

Keene, who had an object in still maintaining his desperate assumption, tackled the one man who wore the garb of the local police.

"Cast off the bow line!" roared Captain Battle, as he sent to the ground a man who had flourished a revolver in his face. "Cast off for'ard! Get aboard there, lad, and trim in the foresheet!"

The progress of the fight was not stayed for an instant during the issue of these commands, and the fiery and powerful little

skipper of the *Mystery* had a heavier hand in it than any other.

Keene had laid out the officer and disarmed him—but subsequent disclosures revealed that it had been done with words rather than blows. With the falling of the policeman, however, the remaining three men fled hurriedly up the wharf, and within another minute, the schooner was cleared from the pier and under way.

"By the gods!" gasped Captain Battle, panting like a porpoise, as he seized the wheel. "That was warm and nasty for a minute!"

Sheridan Keene was at his elbow, making fast the main sheet.

"That, sir!" he rejoined, quietly. "That 'ere was child's play!"

Captain Battle impulsively swung round and held out his hand.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN BATTLE OPENS HIS MOUTH.

"Aye, Mr. Haley, you saved the lad a nasty clip right enough, and you're a man worth knowing. But for you, I reckon he'd a been knocked under. You've made a friend o' him, sir; and all aboard here, as fur as that goes."

That Captain Battle had taken a pronounced fancy to Sheridan Keene may be inferred from the above, vouchsafed by this game little skipper more than an hour after clearing from the wharf in Hingham.

It was after three o'clock in the morning. In another hour the first gray of dawn would light the eastern sky. The wind had shifted nearly into the north. The course home was a beat, and the *Mystery*, close hauled, was then standing in below Peddock's island.

At Captain Battle's orders, Keene had remained aft to man the main sheet. The failure of the job in Hingham, with all its various features, had been discussed until it was threadbare, and a stiff allowance of liquor had been portioned out to assuage the hopes so severely dashed.

Perhaps it was the liquor, or possibly the fancy which Captain Battle now had for Sheridan Keene, that loosened the skipper's tongue. At all events, Captain Battle

opened his mouth in the precise fashion that the detective both had hoped and anticipated.

"Aye, Mr. Haley," he added, turning briefly from the binnacle to glance at Keene's dark face; "you're a man worth knowing and a messmate worth having. You're a sandy man, sir, and I knew it the night you dropped from the ferry."

"Thankee, cap'n," said Keene.

Then, laying down the pipe he had been smoking, he spat over the rail and turned to ask:

"D'ye think we'll make the moorings before daybreak, sir?"

He was inviting the disclosure for which he from the first had been working; and he now was not disappointed. He had caught Captain Battle in the right mood.

"That'll depend, lad."

"On the wind?"

"More on a signal, lad, than on a wind."

"A signal?"

"Aye, man, a signal," nodded Captain Battle. "I don't mind telling you now, since I am sartin of your loyalty. If we get no signal from Morton, it would not be safe to put in and take up our moorings, providing our trick to-night had turned as we hoped."

"I reckon I don't understand, sir."

"I'll tell you, since now you're one of us," said Captain Battle, with some enthusiasm. "This ere work of ours is no haphazard business. It's done, and has been done, on a system, the head o' which is Mr. Morton, and the body o' which is the *Mystery* and her crew. Morton does the planning and looks up the jobs; we do the work."

"Aye, sir, I can see that much."

"This 'ere work has now been going on for weeks, and we never had a hitch or break till this ere night. The cellar of Morton's house, lad, is stowed full o' goods we have lifted from time to time. More'n that, we have sold enough for a good wad of money for one and all."

"But what is this signal you speak of, sir?"

"I will tell you, lad," grimly explained the skipper. "Morton has a brother-in-law on the police force, d'ye see! And he's the last man as would be suspected o' being in

with a gang operating these breaks. His name is Page, and he's friendly with the officers in town, and knows more or less of the hull squad of detectives at headquarters."

"This Page does?"

"Aye, lad."

"And what does Page do, sir?"

"He keeps Morton informed, lad, as to whether the force has learned anything about us and the schooner, and whether the detectives are taking any steps to haul us over the coals. D'ye see what the game is, lad? If we'd a lot o' stolen goods aboard her, taken to-night in Hingham, it would not be dead safe for us to run into port and make her moorings, providing the police had wind of our work and were looking to overhaul us."

"Sure not, sir," assented Keene.

"If that were the case, lad, we'd not know it, being aboard her. But Morton would at his house. He can get word by telephone at any minute."

"Aye, sir, I see that."

"So we have a signal, lad, which Morton gives us when he thinks it's about time we should be making into the harbor. If we get the signal, lad, we know it's all right to put in and make fast to our moorings. But if we should not get it, the game would be to turn sharp about afore the harbor police could overhaul us, and put out to sea till we could place our booty on some island or shore, and get word from Morton just what the trouble might be. D'ye see?"

"That's plain enough, cap'n," nodded Keene, with manifest approval. "Will you get the signal to-night, sir?"

"Sure, lad!" exclaimed Captain Battle, turning briefly to gaze about the harbor. "If it be all right to run in, Morton will show a red light from one o' the windows of his house on Winthrop heights. If we sight it, we'll know it's safe enough to make our moorings, and that nothing is suspected at headquarters."

"There might be other red lights around about there, sir, I'd think."

"We've headed off that, my man," cried Captain Battle, grimly. "Our signal is intermittent, my lad. It comes and goes. D'ye

see! And we can tell it dead easy from any other light around about there. We've got that part of the work down pat, Haley, and there's never a hitch as far as the signal is concerned."

"D'ye never have bother with the harbor police, sir?"

Captain Battle laughed grimly.

"Not in the way you mean, lad," he replied, shaking his head. "Yet I ran afoul o' the infernal craft a few nights back, and came near staving a hole in her broadside."

"How was that, sir?"

"We were making in from a job down near Marblehead, and I had stood up the harbor till I was well above President Roads. The signal was showing all right, lad, but the night was dark'n the devil. All hands were watching the signal, d'ye see, and never an eye was out ahead."

"That was careless, I'd say."

"So 'twas, lad," nodded Captain Battle; "but we're not often that. The first I knew we were nigh aboard the infernal tug, which I recognized the instant I clapped my peepers on her lights. I rounded into the wind, missing her by a hair, and ran astern o' her and stood for Old Harbor. They hailed us, lad, but I gave 'em a bluff I was a South Boston boat and so made way afore they could heave me to and board me."

"Good for you, sir," said Keene, approvingly.

"Two days arter," continued Captain Battle, little dreaming to whom he was making these fatal disclosures, "Morton thought 'twould be a clever scheme for me to visit the police headquarters and report a robbery aboard our craft. That 'ere would turn the police from thinking that we were up to any game. D'ye see? And I could learn also whether they had any doubts o' the schooner."

"Aye, sir, that was a shrewd move for a fact," said Keene, nodding with much satisfaction. "Did you do it, sir?"

"Aye, lad, I did; and gave the officers a bluff that would turn 'em green if they knew the whole truth!" cried Captain Battle, with a deep laugh of self-satisfaction. "I'll never forget it, lad, though I live a hundred years. Next day they sent a powder-monkey of an

officer aboard, and he looked us all over; but he'd no eyes or ears for anything but what I had told, and we knew we had 'em dead to rights."

"And that's the right way, sir, for a fact."

"Aye, lad, we're safe enough for the present," nodded Captain Battle, with grim enjoyment. "And now you know the whole game, Haley, and we're glad you're one of us. Morton will be more'n satisfied with the ready hand you gave us to-night, for all that the job was a failure. You'll stand to be no loser, lad, my word for it."

"I'll do my part, Captain Battle, never doubt that," said Sheridan Keene, coming down from the cabin roof on which he had been seated. "Will you sight the signal soon, d'ye think?"

"Aye, lad, we should sight it now."

Keene walked a few feet forward and peered over the weather rail. He now had secured all the evidence he desired; but he had learned also a fact which even he had not fully anticipated.

That the officer he had met in Winthrop was so closely identified with this gang of criminals he had not considered probable. He had not mentioned the meeting to Sergeant Henry, even, and the oversight now left open a possibility which appealed to him with considerable force. If this traitor policeman had by any means discovered the fact that Keene was aboard the *Mystery*, the danger in which the detective now stood would be severely aggravated; and Keene fully realized it.

Under these unexpected conditions, he felt as eager as any man aboard to sight the red signal light on that particular night.

It then was nearly four o'clock.

The schooner already was off Spectacle island, and bearing for President Roads.

Within a quarter hour the signal should show from the distant heights of Winthrop, providing no intimation of the existing danger had been received by Page, and imparted to Richard Morton.

Added to the discoveries he had made, Sheridan Keene had, in the face of all his possible peril, one other cause for gratification. Though he necessarily had been unarmed at the time he boarded the *Mystery*,

he that night had relieved of his revolver the Hingham officer with whom he purposely had engaged in the recent encounter, and the weapon was then in the detective's hip pocket. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he possessed at least that means of defence, and that the fact was not known to the men aboard the schooner.

A cry from Captain Battle brought him out of his brief cogitations, and he again turned aft.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER TRUE COLORS.

"Come aft here, Staggars, and take the wheel!"

This was the command from Captain Battle, which had brought Sheridan Keene back to an appreciation of the more immediate situation.

Staggars came hurrying aft, and relieved the grim little skipper, and the latter bustled down the companionway into the cabin.

Keene imagined that he had gone below for another drink, which very likely was in part the truth; but presently he came hurrying above board again, bearing in his hand the vessel's telescope.

"It's time we sighted the signal," he growled, half-angrily.

"So 'tis, sir," assented Mr. Staggars, with a glance to the windward.

"Morton ain't the kind to leave us blind."

"Never yet, sir."

Captain Battle adjusted the glass, and standing with his short legs spread asunder for a brace, studied for several minutes the distant shore, the elevated contour of which was faintly discernible against the starry northern sky.

"I'm cursed if I can find it!" he presently remarked, in a ferocious undertone.

"Can you make the location, sir?"

"Aye, as well as any night afore," was the grim reply. "If the red light were there, I could see it."

"It can't be there has any danger been discovered since noon," cried Staggars.

"Aye, but it can be, and that's the devil of it!" retorted Captain Battle, with rapidly rising ill-humor. "Some of the moves we've

made of late may not be as clever as we've believed."

Keene smiled within himself, and set the speaker down to be indeed a shrewd little rascal.

But his own danger was appealing to him all the stronger as the moments went by and the signal light remained undiscovered.

The schooner was then bearing for Castle Island on a port tack.

The wind still was holding strong from a northerly point, a moderate sea was running, and the tide was at a half-flood.

Away toward the east, close down upon the horizon, the first narrow strip of gray on the darker sky indicated the approach of dawn.

"There's no signal for us to-night, that's sartin!" Captain Battle at length cried, forcibly, laying down the glass. "Either Morton's asleep or there's suthin' wrong!"

Keene's face did not change by so much as a shadow, and his nerves were as stiff and steady as nerves of steel, yet he instinctively felt the approach of a great peril.

"What'll you do, sir?" he asked, quietly.

"Do!" exclaimed the fiery little skipper, flashing a swift glance over the sea in all directions; "what in blazes can we do, if we go by Morton's orders? 'Twon't do to put in and take up our moorings. We'll have to make an offing, till we can larn for sartin whther we're blind or Morton's dead."

"That's the best to be done, sir," cried Mr. Staggars, approvingly.

"For'ard there!" Captain Battle now turned about and abruptly roared. "Man your sheets to take ship! Up with your helm, Staggars, and stand away for Long Island."

The vessel came smartly into the wind, then swung off on a starboard tack and stood down the bay.

At the end of ten minutes she had put the light on Long Island abeam, and once more Captain Battle ordered her about, and they again stood up the bay.

"I'll have a last look!" he growled, furiously. "If I can't sight her this time on the run in, I'll feel dead sartin there is suthin' wrong."

Involuntarily the hand of Sheridan Keene

stole toward his hip, to make sure his weapon still was safe and secure.

The strip of gray low down in the eastern sky had become wider, and the first soft light of earliest dawn was falling over the wide sweep of tossing sea. The islands were coming into clearer outline. The lights on the distant shores were beginning to pale.

At the end of five more minutes the stars had faded from view in the eastern sky, and daybreak was close at hand.

The schooner meantime was ploughing her way up the harbor on a port tack, and Castle Island soon was brought into view over the lee rail.

Grim Fort Independence took shape in the twilight, and the threatening gray walls showed momentarily lighter against the dark background of rising shore.

"There is no signal for us on this voyage, that's sartin!" cried Captain Battle, now bustling down below again and presently reappearing without his glass.

"What'll you do, sir, now that you're sure?" demanded Mr. Staggers, who still was serving his turn at the wheel.

The actual realization of the conditions seemed to have an assuasive effect upon the petulant little skipper.

"I reckon we'll stand for Marblehead, and put in there until I can get word up to Morton," he said, quite calmly.

"Shall I come about, sir?"

"Wait a bit longer."

"Delay may be dangerous, sir."

"There is no danger yet," returned Captain Battle, with his sharp black eyes searching the upper bay, and then sweeping the sea over either side. "There's no sign of a steamer in any direction, d'ye-see, and that infernal police boat ain't likely to be about this early in the day."

"That's true enough, sir."

"We'll chance a run up toward Apple Island, and like enough we'll get some sign from the heights when the dawn hits 'em," growled Captain Battle, pacing impatiently to and fro.

"Mebbe we will, sir."

"If wuss comes to wuss," continued the doughty little skipper, "there's a stiff wind stirring, and we could show our heels to the

harbor police boat, even should she show up from above here."

"That's so, sir, and the breeze is likely to rise with the sun," rejoined Mr. Staggers, crowding the vessel up a point or two and standing for Apple Island.

"Trim closer for'ard!" yelled Captain Battle when the head sails began to quiver as the schooner came closer into the wind.

Keene felt for the sheath knife which he had been wearing in the strap about his waist and found it in the usual place. As he viewed the taut sheets he observed with what ease and rapidity the tense lines could be severed if only the occasion would appear. In an instant, in that case, the signal could be displayed with which he had planned with Sergeant Henry.

Although the day was now breaking, however, and the darkness of the sea giving way to the soft gray light of early morning, he could discover in no direction any sign of the tug manned by the harbor police.

But a moment later there came a cry from Martin Fales, who was then on the forward deck.

"A sail! A sail!" he yelled, running aft along the weather rail as far as the fore-shrouds.

"Where away, my lad?" shouted Captain Battle.

"There's a cat making out above Apple Island."

Captain Battle rushed below again, and quickly reappeared with the glass.

Rounding the rise of Apple Island a small cat-rigged boat could now be discerned through the twilight, and the dark figures of two men in her standing room.

She was running nearly before the wind on a course that soon would bring her within hailing distance of the *Mystery*, and before a minute had elapsed the disclosure for which Keene was waiting in grim and indifferent silence was made.

"Fore heaven, it's Morton himself!" Captain Battle suddenly cried, as he lowered the telescope from his eye.

"Morton, d'ye say?" demanded Mr. Staggers, in great surprise.

"Aye, Morton and the policeman, Joe Page."

"Is that the brother-in-law?" asked Sheridan Keene.

He spoke without a tremor in his voice; yet he now felt sure, too sure, indeed, that the Winthrop officer had in some way discovered the truth, and that his identity as a Boston inspector of police was known to the men in the approaching boat.

It placed him in a situation the like of which few men would have cared to face.

The odds against him was four to one, possibly six to one, if the two other men should decide to board the *Mystery*; and none of them were men who would shrink from committing a desperate deed should their own lives or liberty require it.

The location was against him, also, on a schooner in midharbor, where his life might be ruthlessly taken and his body sent forever to the bottom of the sea—and all with perhaps no friendly eye to witness the crime or to report his fate to those who would avenge him.

"Aye, Haley, the brother-in-law!" cried Captain Battle, in reply to his question. "He is the Winthrop officer, my lad, and now we'll larn for sure why the signal was missing. There's suthin' dead wrong, lads, or Morton never'd be afloat at this hour."

"D'ye think he is seeking us?" asked Mr. Stagers.

"Who else, indeed, or what else, would have brought him out here at this time," returned Captain Battle, derisively. "He was about to head us off down the bay, if he'd not sighted us so soon."

Sheridan Keene glanced over the sweep of harbor in the direction of the city. His situation was momentarily becoming more and more alarming. He would have given a year's salary to have sighted the harbor police boat at that moment; but the upper bay, whither his gaze was turned, gave him no encouragement of rescue.

"It's a case of play a lone hand, I guess," he said to himself, with a slight compression of his firm lips. "Well, if they down me, I'll at least have a run for my money!"

As the thought, born of a spirit of stern determination crossed his mind, the voice of Richard Morton sounded across the sea.

"Hello, there!"

Keene swung round and gazed in the direction of the call.

The cat was less than fifty yards away, over the weather beam, and the tall dark figure of Morton, erect on the cabin deck, was quite clearly defined against the lighting sky.

Using his hand for a trumpet, he next shouted, lustily:

"Heave to and take me aboard!"

The Winthrop officer, who was in civilian dress, at the same moment brought the smaller boat sharp about and threw an anchor. Then the sail came down on a run.

"Head her up, Stagers!" growled Captain Battle, with an ugly fire in his small black eyes. "What in thunder does this mean? Lend a hand here, Haley, and lower this tender."

Keene sprang to one of the davit lines and the two men quickly dropped the light boat into the sea. Meantime the *Mystery* had come into the eye of the wind and lost her headway, and now hung motionless on the tide, with her sails fore and aft flapping in the breeze.

"Over with you, Haley, and bring him aboard!" commanded the skipper.

Already Keene had made up his mind, if he was assigned to this duty, that he would let Morton get aboard the schooner as best he could, and that he would steal the tender and take the chance of effecting his escape by rowing.

"Send Martin to take me off! Send Martin, I say. Keep Haley aboard!"

Evidently Morton meant to take no chance alone with Keene in the tender; and, though the latter readily appreciated the cause for his objection, the command fell with rather curious effect upon Captain Battle and the others.

"Put off, Martin, and bring him aboard!" cried the captain, bluntly. "Has the man gone daft, or what the devil's amiss! Does he think you can't handle an oar, Haley, that he'll not board the skiff along with you?"

"We shall know what he thinks, cap'n, when he comes over the rail," returned Keene.

Captain Battle gave him a curious stare

on hearing his response, but the true nature of the situation did not once occur to him. On the loyalty of the apparent ruffian, who had done and dared what Sheridan Keene had done and dared, the skipper of the *Mystery* would have staked his liberty even.

Keene unobservedly slipped his revolver into his side pocket.

The vessel still hung without way in the eye of the wind, and, a moment later, the light tender, with Richard Morton aboard, shot alongside. His face was very pale and stern, and without a word in reply to Captain Battle's immediate inquiry as to the occasion for his conduct, and without so much as a glance at Sheridan Keene, he strode aft and took the wheel from the hands of Mr. Staggars.

In the meantime Page sailed toward shore in the catboat.

"Bring that tender aft and hoist it to the davits!" he cried, with a voice that rang like the meeting of steel.

Morton evidently feared Keene, even though the detective was alone. Therefore he was taking every precaution against the detective's escape.

Martin Fales hurried aft with the light skiff, but the expression on the face of the young man was one that Sheridan Keene never forgot. It told the detective that the truth had been imparted to the lad while bringing Morton aboard, and that the boy, for he was but little more than a boy, had already resolved upon something desperate.

With the aid of Staggars, the tender was quickly swung from the davits, and Morton's voice again fell upon the strange silence which had followed his first command—a silence broken only by the wash of the sea alongside, the incessant flapping of the sails and the singing of the morning breeze through the taut rigging.

"Man the sheets fore and aft!" he commanded, with terrible severity. "Lively, every man of you! To the foresheet, Haley, and look sharp!"

Had the police boat *Watchman* but been in sight, Keene could not have received an order that would have pleased him better. As it was, however, he ran forward and stood by the sheet.

"Trim in!" cried Morton, throwing down the wheel.

Instantly the vessel's head came up and the sails began to fill.

"Ease away forward!"

The schooner was gathering way, and with the wind abeam, was bearing down the harbor.

Until that moment Captain Battle, despite that his countenance was as black as midnight and his blood at fever heat, had silently endured the utter disregard with which he had been treated by Morton, whose white face and terrible sternness were sufficient to have briefly quelled almost any man.

Now, however, the fiery, touch-and-go temper of this grim little seaman came to the front with all its force and violence. With an oath that was more than half lost in the roar of rage that accompanied it, he danced directly under the frowning eyes of the vessel's owner and demanded in tones that seemed to shake the very air:

"D'ye see me, Dick Morton? D'ye know I'm here? Did you hear me ask what in blazes this ere business means? Tell me why you've come aboard here in this fashion, and where you're bound, or by the eternal gods——"

"I am bound out to sea!" Morton sternly interrupted, with his eyes flashing fire.

"For what?"

"To find, in water deep enough to suit me, a grave for one man aboard here!"

"A grave!"

"Aye, Captain Battle; a grave!" thundered Morton. "For your man Haley is not what you suppose! He's a spy aboard the *Mystery*! He's an inspector of the Boston police and his name is Sheridan Keene!"

CHAPTER IX.

KEENE SQUARES ACCOUNTS.

Sheridan Keene's hand went into his side pocket and closed around the butt of his revolver. From where he stood every man on the schooner's deck was under his eye.

For a moment not a man moved. The violence with which the disclosure had been made and the nature of it, caused such con-

sternation and amazement as to briefly hold them powerless.

Then Martin Fales darted across the deck and came nearer the detective.

"That man—an impostor!" roared Captain Battle, the moment he could find his voice.

"An impostor, yes!"

"D'ye know that?"

"Better than I know you."

"And I've told him——"

But the last word of Captain Battle's infuriated sentence was choked in his throat. With the truth brought home to him in a way he could not doubt, his rage became a one in which words could have no part. With his dark features fairly convulsed with passion, he turned sharp about and started forward, drawing his revolver as he went.

Then, before Sheridan Keene could act for himself, Martin Fales performed an exploit which later saved him a term of years in prison.

With his boyish face strangely white under its coat of tan, yet with eyes to which youthful courage and resolution lent an heroic fire, he sprang directly in front of the detective, shielding him with his own slight figure and shrieked at the top of his lungs and with a passion utterly indescribable:

"Avast, Cap'n Battle! You shall not shoot this man! So help me God, I'll not stand by and see it done! He did me a turn to-night, and——"

"Out o' my way, or——"

"I'll not!" wildly screamed the lad, with his arms upraised and his slight figure tremulous with excitement. "I'll not stand for you to run my neck into a noose! Don't fire, for your life! If you kill him, you'd best kill me as well, or I'll betray you as surely as God hears me! If it's one it's both, and——"

Then the lad felt himself thrust aside by the hand of Sheridan Keene himself, and

Captain Battle found himself facing the muzzle of the detective's revolver.

"Drop that weapon, Captain Battle!" commanded Keene. "Raise it but a hair and I'll fire! Drop it instantly, I say, or your life——"

But the revolver had left the hand of the irate captain, and fell clattering to the schooner's deck. In the face of Sheridan Keene, in his blazing eyes and the commanding sternness of his ringing voice, there had been that which spoke louder even than words, and Captain Battle, with features distorted by impotent fury, obeyed for sake of the life that for a moment at least had hung as by a thread.

"Now listen to me, you men!" cried Keene, in tones that rang over the silent vessel. "Your game is up, and you will have to pay the penalty for your crimes whether you slay me or not! If you choose to kill me, and to satisfy vengeance at the cost of your own lives on the scaffold, sail in as soon as you like, and we'll have it out to a finish! If you take my advice, however——"

"We'll take your liberty instead, my hearty!"

The interruption came from Mr. Staggars, and Sheridan Keene felt himself suddenly seized from behind by the burly seaman who had stolen nearer while the detective's gaze was directed upon the schooner's furious skipper.

A yell of satisfaction now rose from the lips of Captain Battle, and Richard Morton also started forward from the wheel. But Martin Fales had snatched up the revolver from the deck, and again stood resolutely in the way of their designs.

"Avast, both of you!" he shouted. "Another step and I'll fire!"

Keene meantime was in a violent struggle with Staggars, and had succeeded in worming about in the ruffian's arms and meeting

him face to face. At the same moment he beheld, over the seaman's shoulder, a sight that sent the blood through his viens with a sudden surge of joyous triumph.

Issuing from beyond the grim walls of Fort Independence, a half mile away, under a full head of steam and with the black smoke pouring in dense volumes from her funnel, suddenly appeared the police tug *Watchman*. The unexpected sight brought an involuntary cry from Keene's lips:

"The harbor police!"

It caught Stagers unprepared. He involuntarily turned his head to glance in the direction Keene was gazing, and his grip on Keene momentarily relaxed. Instantly Keene wrenched free one of his arms, and with the butt of his weapon dealt the seaman a blow that sent him reeling to the deck.

Then he darted forward, snatching out his knife from its sheath, and, with a single powerful stroke, he severed the line sheeting home the jib.

Instantly the voluminous folds of canvas were flapping noisily and wildly in the morning air.

The signal scarce had been made before a boom sounded heavily over the sea.

It was the report of a gun from the deck of the harbor police boat, informing Sheridan Keene that his needs were known and ordering the vessel to heave to.

This unexpected turn of events evidently gave a new complexion to the situation, as it was viewed by Mr. Richard Morton. For he abruptly turned away aft and ran to the wheel, shouting to Captain Battle:

"This way! This way! Follow me, Battle!"

Captain Battle was too shrewd a rascal not to have discovered ere this that the game was up, and that arrest was inevitable. And he had by far too profound a regard for his ugly little body to risk his neck by gratify-

ing his vengeance under such conditions as those now confronting him.

At Morton's command he now turned sharply about, bestowing only a bitter shake of his fist at Martin Fales, and bustled aft to join Morton at the wheel.

"What have you aboard?" demanded the latter, instantly.

"Not a thing in the way o' plunder," said Battle, quickly.

"The job in Hingham?"

"Was a dead failure! We escaped, and that was all."

"Then, by heaven, we'll try to fool them yet! Page learned that Keene was aboard here, and told me only at twelve o'clock last night, too late for me to head off the Hingham job. But the whole truth may not be known, and if Page can get the stuff out of my cellar before——"

Boom!

Again the gun sounded from the deck of the *Watchman*, and now Sheridan Keene, revolver in hand, came striding aft.

"Heave to this vessel!" he commanded, sternly. "If you are men and not fools, you'll now take your medicine in small doses rather than large ones. Heave to, I say!"

"Throw the craft into the wind, Captain Battle," said Morton, smiling coldly. "This presumptuous fellow evidently thinks that we are malefactors of some sort!"

It was a bluff that brought a laugh to the lips of Sheridan Keene; and even Captain Battle smiled grimly, as he took the wheel from the vessel's owner and brought the *Mystery* into the eye of the wind.

He did not then tell Morton, however, that he had imparted to Sheridan Keene the entire history of their criminal operations, and the former scarce realized the folly of the hope to which he would have clung.

A moment later the harbor police tug ran

alongside, and Sergeant Henry, followed by two of the police, sprang aboard.

"Well, Keene?" he instantly cried, inquiringly.

"Well, indeed, sergeant!" returned Sheridan Keene, cheerfully, extending his hand. "Well, indeed, since the work is done and the culprits are ours!"

There was but little delay aboard the *Mystery* after that, either for congratulations or explanations, and the rest may be briefly told.

Within a half-hour the schooner, with sails trimly furled by her own crew, was taken in tow by the tug and brought to the wharf in Boston, and her whole crew speedily lodged in the tombs.

Anticipating that an attempt might be made to remove the stolen property from Morton's house, Keene had, immediately upon arriving at the wharf, telephoned to Chief Watts for a detail of officers to meet him at the East Boston ferry, and the entire party hastened to Morton's residence. They found Page engaged in the very work Keene had expected, and he also was placed under arrest.

Five weeks later the entire gang, save one, received in the Criminal Court their just deserts for their crimes, and went up at hard labor for a term of years.

One only escaped imprisonment, and that through the intercession of Sheridan Keene.

The detective could not ignore the part Martin Fales had taken in the scenes of that last morning aboard the *Mystery*. He thought he detected the making of some thing better in the lad, and, as subsequent events demonstrated, his discernment was not at fault.

Martin Fales was released on probation, and through Keene's efforts was later provided with honorable employment, to which he since has applied himself with an industry that indicates at least a desire to merit the approval of the man who befriended him.

As a matter of fact, Martin Fales thinks there is no man in the world like Sheridan Keene.

THE END.

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